

I oppose loosening the rules designed to promote and protect diversity of media ownership. These rules were adopted to ensure that the public would receive a diverse range of viewpoints from the media, and not simply the opinions of a handful of media conglomerates. The newspaper/broadcast

cross-ownership cap is a crucial element of our democratic media, and it should not be weakened.

FCC Chairman Michael Powell and fellow commissioners:

I am writing in reference to docket number 01-235, regarding cross-ownership of newspapers and television stations in the same market.

I have both worked in the news media and studied the effects of ownership concentration. I teach communication as well, and I spend considerable time educating my students on the history and rationale for the diversity protections that were put in place to safeguard our public airways from becoming the monopoly of any single private interest.

There is no doubt in my mind that if the FCC drops or weakens or eliminates the same-market ownership restrictions on newspaper/TV ownership, our democracy will suffer immensely. I would say the same for weakening limitations on cable ownership.

If you want a single case that illustrates the problem, I give you the Florida case of reporters Steve Wilson and Jane Akre. They were told to rewrite a story on GBH in Florida's dairy cows after Monsanto put pressure on Fox television (which had purchased the Tampa station -WTVT - during the reporters' investigation). When the reporters threatened to report to the FCC that they were being told to violate their own contracts and the licensee's requirements by putting false information on the air, they were fired. They sued under Florida's whistleblower protection statute, and were vindicated by a Tampa jury.

During the trial, the local TV station pretended the controversy didn't exist, and when the verdict was announced, WTVT put on the network's spinmeisters to declare it a victory for the station.

While the coverage of the local newspapers left some things to be desired from a journalistic standpoint, it was, at least, balanced and clearly attempting to be fair and accurate.

If those newspapers had also been owned by Fox, there is little likelihood that Florida citizens and parents would have even known about this attempt to keep from them vital information about what they were pouring on their children's milk every morning.

When Mr. Jefferson said, at the founding of our republic, "Give the people the light and they will find their own way," he was not contemplating that everyone would rely on one single blue light emanating from an electronic box in their living room and owned by a single corporate monolith, which would also control the print media.

Democracy can only stay strong when its citizenry are guaranteed access to diverse points of view and vital information. Please do not undermine our democracy further than deregulation of the media industry already has by giving the conglomerates this last Christmas present.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

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